

WASHINGTON, DC – Congressman Steny H. Hoyer (D-MD) was the keynote speaker at the Epilepsy Foundation's annual conference this morning. As a senior member of the House Committee that funds the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Congressman Hoyer has worked to establish and increase funding for epilepsy programs and is a champion for disability issues generally. In addition, in 2003, he helped secure funds to help the Epilepsy Foundation, headquartered in Maryland, raise awareness about how to treat and prevent seizures.

Congressman Hoyer also shepherded the Americans with Disabilities Act to overwhelming approval in 1990. This landmark civil rights legislation has helped millions of people with disabilities enter the workforce, achieve independence and go as far as their talents take them. Following are Congressman Hoyer's remarks as prepared for delivery.

"I want to thank the families here today for coming to Washington. It is so important that you work to raise awareness and put a human face to issues surrounding epilepsy. I am also pleased that two years ago Congress worked with the Epilepsy Foundation to, for the first time, establish November as National Epilepsy Awareness Month.

"As some of you may know, I have long worked closely with the Epilepsy Foundation. My wife, Judy, served as a member of the Epilepsy Foundation's national Board of Directors. I am pleased that in 2002 the National Institutes of Health created the 'Judith Hoyer Lecture in Epilepsy,' which they sponsor annually. My good friend Tony Coelho now serves as the chair-elect of the Epilepsy Foundation Board of directors, and has worked tirelessly on your behalf.

"You should know that this is a critical time for you to be in Washington. We are facing difficult budget times, and Congress is facing very hard choices. The President's Fiscal Year 2006 Budget cuts overall discretionary spending for the Department of Health and Human Services by almost 3 percent.

"Although in recent years we have increased investment into medical research at the National Institutes of Health, where about \$104 million is being spent annually on epilepsy research, we are now facing the prospect of bringing that progress to a screeching halt.

“The President has also proposed a 10 percent cut at the Centers for Disease Control, where critical public health funding for epilepsy is provided. And a 12.3 percent cut for the Health Resources and Services Administration, where we have begun a program to improve services in medically underserved areas.

“Regrettably, the budget that just passed the House matches the President’s levels for domestic discretionary spending.

“Through the hard work of the Epilepsy Foundation’s representatives in Washington, funding for epilepsy programs has managed to receive adequate funding in recent years. I will work with them to ensure that success continues this year.

“Furthermore, we are facing potential dismantlement of two key entitlement programs that sustain people with disabilities: Medicaid and Social Security.

“The Medicaid program is the single most important healthcare and long-term support program for people with disabilities. Eleven million people with disabilities, including 2 million children, rely on the Medicaid program for basic medical care, hospital care, prescription drug coverage, and long-term supportive services including home and community-based care. Yet, the House-passed Republican budget would cut \$20 billion dollars out of the Medicaid program.

“The president is also attacking Social Security. More than five million people with disabilities receive SSI benefits, and over 6 million receive benefits under the Disability Insurance Program.

“In his rush to dismantle this critical social insurance program, I believe that the President has failed to adequately consider the devastating impact that his risky privatization scheme will have on people with disabilities and their families.

“Thanks to your energy and advocacy, we can be successful on these issues that matter to families across our country. I look forward to continuing our work together and am grateful for all that you are doing to ensure that people with epilepsy have a voice in Washington.”

Attending the conference from Maryland's Fifth Congressional District, both from Waldorf, were Adam Modzelesky who is a writer and has epilepsy and Kenneth Cunningham who retired from the US Air Force in 1999 after 23 years of service and is also a staff member at the Epilepsy Foundation.

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